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"Truth Is One, Men Call It By Various Names." ---RIG VEDA

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Message of the East

VOLUME XLII 1953 NUMBER 2

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THE LIGHT OF MEDITATION

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REGULAR EVENTS

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Sister Daya in charge.
Class: Thurs. 8 P.M.

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Message of the East

"And behold the glory of God of
Israel came from the way of the East."
—*Ezekiel*
"Light shall come again from the East."
—*Tyndall*

VOLUME XLII 1953 NUMBER 2

UNIVERSAL MESSAGE

"To him who is perfect in meditation salvation is very near," is an old saying. Do you know when a man becomes perfect in meditation? When as soon as he sits down to meditate, he becomes surrounded with Divine atmosphere and his soul communes with God.

—*Sri Ramakrishna*

The Light is not in the body alone, neither is it only outside the body. Mountains and rivers and the great Earth are lit by sun and moon; all that is this Light. Therefore it is not only within the body. Understanding and clarity, knowing and enlightenment, and all motion (of the spirit), are likewise this Light; therefore it is not just something outside the body . . . Children, take heed! If for a day you do not practice meditation, this Light streams out, who knows whither? If you only meditate for a quarter of an hour, you can set ten thousand aeons and a thousand births at rest. All methods take their source in quietness.

—*The Secret of the Golden Flower* (*Chinese*)

Leisure is a form of silence, of that silence which is a prerequisite of the apprehension of reality: only the silent hear and those who do not remain silent, do not hear . . . For Leisure is a receptive attitude of mind, a contemplative attitude, and it is not only the occasion but also the capacity for steeping oneself in the whole of creation . . . It is in these silent and receptive moments that the soul of man is sometimes visited by an awareness of what holds the world together. —*Josef Pieper*

THE LIGHT OF MEDITATION

By Swami Paramananda

The light which never fails us is the light of meditation, kindled from within, and it is through that light that we gain the vision of Truth.

In our spiritual study meditation is given as the most vital factor in the inner life. There are, however, some important steps we have to take before we can even understand its true meaning. For instance, whenever in our outer life we try to attain some definite end, we start with the idea of struggle. We think that we must fight against all opposition, and overcome all obstacles through the force of our personal will. But struggle means an acute consciousness of our personal self — a sense of our own importance or unimportance, or both, whereas on the spiritual path, we must be absolutely devoid of that self-consciousness. In fact, no true meditation is possible until the consciousness of self is dropped.

Now let us try to consider this from the intellectual standpoint. The mind, as we know it, connects us with the phenomenal world — the world of self-consciousness. Our memory, our associations, our past impressions cause an endless number of pictures to pass in constant review within the mind. These rise and disappear, rise and disappear, thus keeping the mind active and in a state of unrest. Now just the reverse of this is required for meditation, which demands that we must be absolutely free from unrest, and tranquil. Therefore self-consciousness which may prove helpful in taking certain preliminary steps involving struggle, is decidedly a hindrance when it comes to the real meditative practice. For struggle disturbs the mind to such an extent that while we are

struggling we cannot settle down to any genuine spiritual effort, and until we can do that it is almost impossible for us to gain any benefit from the practice of meditation. In fact until we have gained control over the mind, and have dropped, for the time being, our self-consciousness, the whole effort will seem useless, aimless and impractical.

Now you may gather from this that I am merely telling you to try to run away from your own self. There are moments when we do feel like running away, but we make the mistake of thinking that by changing our abode, we shall get rid of our troubles and the outside world will no longer be able to disturb us. We soon find, however, that we have plenty within us to make us unhappy, and the question is, how shall we escape from these inner torments? Certainly not by fighting against them, but rather by dropping them. You may ask how this is done, since past impressions will cling to us and memories cause renewed misery. Why not then create other impressions which will bring other memories?

These things of the mind are not permanent. For example, we have done something unjust and unfair. The memory of it is pricking our conscience, making us depressed and unhappy. It is good for us to be repentant and to make amends if possible; but merely to brood over our mistake and yield to depression is not good and will block our progress. In fact, it may lead our mind to a feeling of lethargy and finally to a morbid state. Through meditation we can find our way out. Meditation is not, as some may imagine, a passive, negative inactive state of mind. In fact, it is quite the contrary. It is positive and definite, but it refuses to be distracted or dissipated by the intrusion of self-consciousness.

Here we must make a very fine distinction. Lack of self-consciousness does not lead us to an unconscious condition. It opens up another realm of consciousness and takes us beyond names and forms and worldly objects to something finer and higher where we become aware of our spiritual reality. But in order to accomplish this, we have to be persevering. It is no easy task to make the mind obey. It is no easy task to drop the little self. We have fostered it from our childhood and from before our childhood, because our life did not begin merely with the birth of the body. We came into this life bringing with us many instincts, many tendencies from the past. We may not be consciously aware of these things, yet they are present in seed form, and we certainly cannot wipe them away all at once. Furthermore there are many things which we do not want to wipe away — many experiences gained which can be helpful to us.

Our effort should be to open our mind to the Light of pure Spirit. When it begins to absorb that subtle Light, then our self-consciousness fades away and God-consciousness is born within us. Not at once. Yet every moment that we are able to forget the limited self brings us nearer to that which is vast and unlimited, and for the first time we begin to feel that this phenomenal world is not all in all, but that there is something beyond. One single, direct proof of our true being, our spiritual essence, will remove all doubt and despair; but this proof we cannot find on the outside, it can come to us only when through meditation we open the inner channels of our being.

The energetic mind, the mind that is full of faith and undaunted even in the face of most difficult conditions is not the aggressive or materialistic mind. An ordinary

man is apt to go to pieces whenever he has to meet great danger or difficulty. He sees darkness everywhere and despair overwhelms his soul. With the spiritually illumined man, it is quite the opposite. Sometimes we learn great lessons by observing a noble character. A man of this type, when he meets with difficult problems turns to his inner resources. He draws from something deeper than the personal self, whereas the less enlightened man depends upon outer support. The Light of wisdom shows us however, that this support is fictitious, is not really helpful, and that self-consciousness can be a decided drawback, although we cling to it so desperately. We are afraid that if we let it disappear we may lose everything. The opposite is true. When we learn to let go of self-consciousness, we gain direct spiritual vision and our life becomes expanded. As a result, all that we do becomes more inclusive. We no longer work merely for a personal end or for personal progress, because we have enlarged our sphere.

How do we know that these things are true? How does anybody know that they are true? These are the first questions that will come to our mind when we hear these things stated. We cannot know that they are true until we know them by means of direct experience. Vedic philosophy with its practical application that is known as Yoga, does not ask anyone to believe anything on hearsay, but to verify all things. It claims that if certain things are done, certain results will follow, and this is true not just for some chosen beings but for all who are equipped with human faculties. That is, ultimate vision is for anyone who with earnest spirit and sincerity sets his forces to work in the right direction. There is nothing mystifying about it. Nevertheless among the many

who set out to reach that goal, few persist to the end. In the *Bhagavad Gita,* the Lord Sri Krishna says that "Among thousands of human beings, scarcely one strives for perfection, and among the faithful strivers after perfection scarcely one knows Me in truth." Why? Because among the thousands who actually seek, only one is steadfast enough to attain. Some people begin this spiritual venture with a great deal of enthusiasm, but when the least difficulty arises to block their path, they give up. Others can perhaps endure a little longer, but with them also discouragements cause them to abandon the whole idea. There are those, however, who can not live without seeking and cannot stop seeking until they have attained. Sri Ramakrishna shows through a simple parable how human beings differ in regard to these things. He said that there was once a man, a peasant by birth, who owned a small farm. The ground was poor and often there was lack of rain, but year after year he went on cultivating his crops and never ceased in his efforts. There was another man who lived in the city. After a time he became dissatisfied with his work. One day while out driving, he beheld the peasant's well kept field and immediately bought a few acres and went to work. After a year or two, however, there was a drought; then he became thoroughly discouraged, sold the place and went back to his former home. Nothing could make the peasant give up, and the same way it is with true devotees. They are lovers of Truth. No matter how hard the path may be or how little encouragement they receive, they cannot help but go on with their vocation, and they are the ones who reach the goal.

We must bear in mind that we should not take up the spiritual life merely for a little intellectual satisfaction.

It must be because of a feeling which comes from the depth of our being; for no mere surface feeling will long endure. To a certain extent we all have yearning for spiritual things, but we do not know how to analyze it, and therefore, we are not aware that it is a spiritual yearning. We think it is *things* that we want; we seek distraction among material objects, believing that they will give us what we desire, that this or that will bring us peace. In the process we scatter ourselves and ultimately find nothing but pain and disappointment. Meditation works just the other way. Instead of scattering our forces, it collects them, makes us normal and brings us into balance. The point of balance is the point of rest, and the mind that is at rest alone can gain clear vision. When the surface of water is perfectly calm, then the water becomes transparent, and we can see what lies beneath it. The same way it is with our mind, with our character, with our whole being. As long as these remain disturbed and full of turmoil, we cannot realize our inner possibilities. Thus naturally we give way to doubt and despair, and that very mental attitude becomes a drawback in our evolution.

All these elements proceed from our self-consciousness. Therefore, the first step in our spiritual practice, especially in relation to meditation, should be to get away from this egotistic sense. We all can do this to a certain extent. We can, for instance, forget our importance or our unimportance, whether people like us or don't like us, whether we are of high estate or low. All such ideas we can drop from our mind, and if we can succeed in doing this even for a few moments, we shall be surprised at the result. By letting go of our finite concepts, we make room in our hearts for the infinite, and in infinitude we

find our rest. There is no practice so restful as this; also it has great healing power. Those who are tormented mentally or physically will be restored, made whole once more if they can turn their attention away from self and self-interest. This can be done, and the most potent means for bringing this about is the practice of meditation.

People make a mistake when they think that meditation has value only in regard to spiritual evolution. It has also wonderful value in relation to outer life. It has power to make us whole, to mend the little broken parts of our being and give us bodily strength as well as mental poise. Moreover, it is not sectarian. It is neither Christian nor Mohammedan, neither Hindu nor Buddhist. It has to do solely with the control and focusing of the mind, and its results are always the same wherever it is practiced. It is that mental quality whereby we forget the world — the outer, the material world of name and form. As soon as we are able to do that, we come into the presence of That One behind all, the subtle, the invisible, and yet the most real.

When meditating we close our eyes in order that we may cease to see the things that distract us. In this way we prepare our inner sight for the great vision. We close our ears in order to make ourselves deaf to the mortal sounds, and in this way open our hearing to that which is not heard by the ordinary ear. We say, "May my eyes, my ears, my senses be closed to all the distractions of the world, that I may come in contact with the infinitude of God." At first they will be only words, but as we say them and absorb a little of their meaning, gradually our mind becomes permeated with their living spirit and after a time we forget all thoughts but the one

thought. This is meditation, whereby unconsciously even the sense of struggle we had in the beginning fades away.

Thus step by step we become part of that which at the outset seemed impossible to attain. But nothing is impossible. We must entirely banish from our mind the word "impossibility" or the thought that "I am too old," or "It is too late to begin." The spirit is potent, nothing is too difficult for it. Negative thoughts we must remove from our mind, but not by becoming aggressive or egotistic; that would only lead to more self-consciousness. Past impressions can be wiped out by new impressions, new ideas, new associations, and in this way liberate us from the conditions that for so long have been obstructing our spiritual endeavors.

It is by true understanding that we are able to overcome struggle and remedy evil. We overcome evil by good. The good is full of God, full of Light, and as we approach the Light, the darkness naturally falls away from us, it disappears. You do not have to ask that it be removed; it is removed as the Light comes. So it is that as we are able to bring Light into our consciousness from our innermost being, all the darkness and doubt and turbulence which at present we feel, will cease, will completely vanish.

We must not expect anything to happen too suddenly, however. Gradual growth is best. What comes to us in a flash may go away from us in a flash. It is nice to have enthusiasm, and it can be very helpful, but do not yield too much to exuberance, or lack moderation, for that always brings reaction. No matter what you do, remember to be moderate. In your outer life be moderate; in your spiritual life also be moderate. It is not well to overstrain the mind. If you do, instead of helping you it will

hinder you; it will throw you back in the opposite direction. At the time, you may feel a certain exaltation; but later, the reaction will come and perhaps carry you far away from your Ideal.

Remembering to do things in moderation can be a tremendous safeguard in life. Moderation in itself is a great strength, because it means balance. Doing too much out of impulsiveness shows a certain lack of stability; not doing at all means lethargy; doing in moderation brings attainment. Sri Krishna gives that lesson to his disciple, Arjuna, in the *Bhagavad Gita.* He says:

"The practice of Yoga is not for him who eats too much or who does not eat at all, nor for him who sleeps too much or keeps awake (in excess).

"He who is moderate in eating and recreation, moderate in his efforts in work, moderate in sleep and wakefulness, (his practice of) Yoga becomes the destroyer of all misery."

You see, he includes all activities. In nothing can we afford to go to extremes. Therefore that man who desires to be master of himself, let him be moderate in all things.

These teachings may seem simple. The most profound spiritual truths are simple; but when we seek to apply them, we find that they are not so easy to put into practice, because our own nature is complex, our desires mixed up and confused. Thus we, ourselves, must become more simple. We must become homogeneous. Even in our setbacks we must guard against self-reproach and depression. To feel helpless, disappointed, overpowered by our sense of lack can become a great detriment. More than that, it is an enemy to all higher attainment because it causes us to feel disconnected from the Infinite Source of our being. It is not humility; it is negative self-con-

sciousness, and negative self-consciousness can be just as destructive as the positive kind. Egotistic assumption seems to work just the other way, but it is equally lacking in faith and true vision. The egotist, instead of placing his heart, his mind and all his faculties in the hands of that One who alone is capable of helping him, takes the whole responsibility in his own feeble hands, not knowing that his hands become strong only through the consciousness of that higher Power.

The idea of losing the self through meditation in what the Buddhists call Nirvana or superconsciousness does not mean death; it means the ripening of the consciousness. It never means annihilation. It is a Light that you carry with you always; it is an inward peace that you realize not only when you are seated in meditation in your consecrated corner but even when you go into the midst of a crowd. No matter where you go that sense of spiritual perfection, that sweetness of silence will accompany you, so that everyone who comes near you will feel its influence. What a blessing it is to be able to bring peace and serenity into this world of unrest, misery, doubt and despair. A truly illumined spirit may not speak a word to anyone with the idea of instructing; yet his very being will radiate all benign and blessed qualities.

These things that I say are not imaginary . If you are in earnest you will soon see the result first in yourself and then in others. By this I do not mean merely a temporary gain. By following steadfastly the way of the Ideal through meditation and inward control, you will become established in That which is the Source of all joy, all freedom, all peace, and you will know a strength which will never fail you and which will sustain you even in the darkest hour.

FROM ACROSS THE BLACK WATER

Letters from Gayatri Devi

II

New Delhi, December 9, 1952

Dear Ones in the East and West: . . . My last letter . . . left Delhi somewhat unfinished, due to the rush at the time of leaving for Hardwar. I thought pressure and haste belonged to America and it does, but as I have been under it for such a long period the influence has marked my habits. Now I am effortfully changing them in order to be free from the least trace of nervousness, which certainly is no asset of mine. To live freely and with a sense of leisure not hampered by routine is doing wonders for me. I am so relaxed and altogether adjusted to the Indian way of life . . .

Swami Ranganathananda, the head of the Math here, had written to Ramakrishna Mission Sevashrama about our intended visit. We were received there with extreme cordiality, although we were not allowed to stay at the guest house without a male person in our company. Hardwar Ashrama is a perfect combined unit for spiritual practice and service. The Swamis there are embodiments of cheerfulness and hospitality. We were accorded overwhelming attention and care by each one. We ate three meals there, one a special feast prepared for our benefit. The hospital accommodates fifty patients; the young *Brahmachari* who showed us the place spoke of them as *Narayana,* the Lord, and expressed his joy in the chosen vocation. The Shrine is a real gem, permeated with fragrance and vibrant with living Presence.

There is another Ashrama in Hardwar built under the name of a great *sadhu,* Bholananda Giri. We attended

bhajan or worship in song there, took lunch and dinner on three different occasions, and had fine contact with the Swamis. One of them, a holy man of seventy-nine, was humility personified; he felt attracted to us and asked for a personal interview, speaking of himself being in the capacity of a disciple. He hired a taxi for our pilgrimage to Hrishikesh, came to our quarters at the Station Retiring Rooms for visits, and asked for some literature. I gave him the copy of the *Message* which had my article on *Daily Yoga.*

This Ashrama is located on the Ganges, a beautiful site. From the second story of the *dharma shala,* or pilgrims' inn, we watched our sacred river, clear-watered, and singing, the beloved of India's millions of children. The tonga (a primitive horse carriage) -driver said to us, "Ganga is everywhere here; when her water dries up, Hardwar becomes a desert." The educated and the illiterate speak of Ganges, or Ganga, as Mother; there is a temple dedicated to Her worship which enshrines Her image (another aspect of Divine Mother). We bought flowers, tiny earthen lamps, and camphor to offer in Her worship, and floated them on Her waters.

There are innumerable shrines all along the Ganges. The most well known are Brahma Kunda (pool), Sati Kunda, and Daksha's Palace. The legends associated with them are from our ancient literature, *Puranas,* tales of gods, saints and kings. You should have heard the illiterate carriage driver tell us the story of Daksha's sacrifice, in which Sati (an incarnation of Divine Mother) gave up her body because her father, Daksha, insulted her husband and Lord, Mahadeva (Siva). Where else on this earth do the poor and the unlearned common people guard their spiritual culture? We were quite im-

pressed when at sundown our driver stopped the carriage to attend to the horse while chanting for a brief second "Hari Om."

Hardwar is not only a very sacred place but also the gateway to other pilgrimages at the foot of the Himalayas farther north. Here I had my first vision of the mountains, although only the lower ranges. We could see in the distance some snow-clad peaks; even those were not very high. In comparison, the Alps which I had recently seen at the border of Italy and France are far more majestic, but people's adoring attitude brings an atmosphere into our rivers and mountains which is characteristic of India. We worship our benefactors and do not think of them merely as forces of Nature; they are living and real to us.

Here we visited a unique university known as Guru-Kul Vidyalaya, where students receive training and education according to Hindu culture and tradition. It has a department for research into Vedic literature, also a fine museum of old scripts and archaeological objects. Everywhere along Hardwar we saw the symbol for "Om" inscribed at the entrances of houses of worship belonging to various religious groups.

We drove to Hrishikesh by an auto, going north where Ganges enters the plains at Hardwar. The ride through the thickly wooded sections of the Himalayan foothills was an eager adventure. Didi and I sang national songs we had learned in our childhood and which, now, kept on floating up to the surface from memory's storehouse. These Bengali songs describe India's glory and remind us of our past heritage.

. . . From Hrishikesh we walked on the dirt road to Lakshman jhola. Not long ago it was a bridge of rope

on which the pilgrims crossed the Ganges. Now they go to the other side by a simple construction of steel and cables. All along the opposite side are beautiful low buildings in reddish orange stones and graceful wide steps of the same, going down into the river. Here Ganges is like a happy maiden in her blue-green sari, in the arms of her mountain lover, who embraces her from behind.

After crossing Lakshman jhola we climbed down the steps, washed our hands and faces in the crystal clear water and drank the cool, pure nectar out of our cupped palms. We stayed an hour sitting on the shady corner of the steps, and sang some more of Mother India's glory. Then walked through *Swarga-dwar* (gate to heaven) *topovan* (forest retreat) where we saw innumerable little single huts and low houses for the *Sadhus* who come there to practice meditation and *Sadhana.* As we moved on from place to place we met men in *gerua**, and *Brahmacharis* (who wear white) here and there. They belong to various religious Orders. There were among them some young men of the Ramakrishna Mission, too, who were eager to converse with us.

Of the many Shrines along the river one impressed us tremendously, by the cleanliness and beauty of the flower gardens as well as by the Sanctuary. The little room was set in the middle of open marble halls. The central altar was occupied by a fine white marble statue of Lord Shiva, and beside Him were dual forms of Rama and Sita on one side and Radha and Krishna on the other. The young priest, or *Brahmachari,* was observing silence. He expressed friendliness, communicated with us briefly with the aid of a slate and pencil. On the upper part of the

* Orange cloth worn by the Indian Sannyasins or holy men.

walls along the corridor were murals of India's renowned spiritual figures, Buddha, Sankara, Nanak, Ramakrishna, Vivekananda, and others; also Sanskrit inscriptions. This Temple and Ashrama, under the name of Sukadevananda, emanated a fragrance and atmosphere comparable to that of our Ramakrishna Mission Centre here.

We returned to Delhi on the night of Friday, December the 5th, attended the Gita class at Ramakrishna Mission, Sunday at five, and stayed for *Arati* which followed . . .

Monday was Holy Mother's birthday. I arose at five o'clock, in order to be present at the first service from six to seven. Mother and Didi accompanied me to the forenoon worship. Swami Ranganathananda, finding us sitting in the verandah behind a crowd, arranged seats for us in the front, close to the altar. *Homa* or fire worship was performed, which is always something to observe in reverence. You should have seen the offering; One side of the floor was covered with the countless variety of delicacies. As people left, everyone was given a small *shal* leaf basket of cut fruits, sweets, and salty pastries. The entire upstairs where the Shrine is, was packed with people. We were among the only five guests invited to the real lunch, consisting of *prasad.* I met a number of women, among them some young ladies, devoted to the Mission. Swami Yogeswarananda, head of the Mayavati Advaita Ashrama in Almora, was present, with whom we had a pleasant visit . . .

You are eager to learn if India has changed much in the past decade. The answer to that question is, "only very little and mostly on the surface." The problems which face India's government and people are colossal. The poverty, lack of sanitation and education, the un-

employment — beggars, dust, open drains, and refugees, all are seeking solution simultaneously. Here is a mass of humanity, barefooted and with mud-stained garments, who need better living standards and less struggle for existence. As our train pulls out of a big station in Behar, I see men lying on the platform covered by a cloth or blanket, having retired for the night; my heart cries out in pain and shame, "Will India's common people ever see a better day?"

* * * * *

. . . We came on the twelfth (to Calcutta) after twenty-four hours' journey from Delhi. There was quite a reception at the Howrah station. Charushila Devi was there, and of course, most of the members of the family. We were garlanded and given flowers. Mother and I first went to the Ashrama at Dumdum Road where, in the midst of *"Jai"* and the sound of conch shell, I was given a tuberose garland. In the afternoon we started out for the Ashrama at Nagtala where again we were given similar reception. On the following morning, at Charushila Devi's request, I conducted the reading on *Daily Thoughts* and spoke to the girls and teachers in Bengali for the first time. This Ashrama is where she has sheltered three hundred refugee girls at the asking of our government.

Most of the next day we spent at Belur Math, to share in the festivities in honor of Swami Shivananda's birthday. Charushila Devi was suffering from the effects of influenza. So we went to Dumdum early and spent the night there. The following morning I conducted the reading on *Daily Thoughts,* and spoke to the resident members in Bengali, mostly about our Swamiji. In the afternoon we attended the public meeting observing the golden jubilee of Sister Nivedita's school.

(At this point Gayatri Devi describes a severe attack of influenza and other complications which she suffered, and was made seriously ill for three days. She continues:)

This morning, the third day, I am sitting up, the temperature is gone, and I feel like myself. It seems like a miracle that recovery should come so soon. Please do not be concerned. This has come as a warning so that I can be more careful in regard to drinking water and diet. Calcutta is rather an unhealthy place and sanitation is poor . . .

My plan is to observe Christmas Eve service at one of the Ananda Ashramas. They are sixteen miles apart and transportation is not an easy matter here . . .

I am still in bed, from which I write. In all the twenty-six years in America I have never been so ill . . . Only the Lord's grace has pulled me out so quickly. Today I have suffered mostly from extreme weakness. The throat is still somewhat afflicted.

At Christmas I will picture you before the altar of "Mother and Child," intoning carols, and around the glittering tree, or opening the bright colored packages. My heart will be beside you, singing, laughing, loving, and praying. May you feel a new tenderness in your hearts this Christmas, and give it out freely. Let there be joy of a child and peace of a sage born in you as you greet the New Year. This is my earnest prayer.

* * * * *

Calcutta, January 3, 1953

Dear Ones in the Land of All Pleasant Things:

This, my first letter of 1953, will fly toward you carrying with it my deepest love and best thoughts. To say that I think of you daily and habitually is an understatement of fact. My identification with you is such that

you enter into consciousness and take your place there in my waking and sleeping hours. I pray for you constantly . . . Again and again through the mind I find myself transported to your side. I know well and from experience that there is neither distance nor separation in the communion of souls . . .

On Christmas Eve I went to Nagtala Ananda Ashrama, which is the school and home of the three hundred refugee girls, and consecrated teachers. There Jadu (Charushila Devi) had planned for the special service before the altar of Madonna and Child. It was a simple ceremony; the girls sang several Bengali songs; I was able to voice *Silent Night* in some manner, then narrate in the mother-tongue the birth story of Jesus, as well as tell them how we observe Christmas in the United States . . .

Some of you will realize that our family is so large and there are so many separate homes that it is a matter of constant conjecture where and with whom and how long I should remain. At the two Ashramas too, all the girls pull on my heartstrings; therefore I do my best to satisfy everyone. Jadu leaves me free to make my own plans and fits into mine with utmost ease. For the last two days I have been at the Dumdum Road Ashrama, from where this letter is being written.

Yesterday was an all-day celebration here, in remembrance of Holy Mother's birthday centenary. From early dawn, music, singing, chanting began. Mother's large picture was dressed in a new pink silk sari, bordered in gold, occupying a separate high throne and adorned with flowers, potted plants and garlands. I watched the girls, barefooted, with long hair covering their backs, moving softly to and fro decorating the altars. They

were stringing garlands, bringing varieties of offerings, performing worship and fire-ritual. Jadu took me to the kitchen where two girls were engaged in cooking, others cutting vegetables on a large scale and some preparing spices on large stone slabs with stone rolling pins. All day long people came, visiting the Shrine, attending various religious functions there, and having meals. Approximately five hundred and fifty persons were fed. Some of the main workers (the girls) did not have the opportunity to take their dinner until the sunset hour. Under Charushila Devi's supervision all the activities were carried out with such smoothness. She has lovely girls! They serve, always smiling and with eager spirit.

On the following day (January 3) a public meeting was arranged to pay tribute to Holy Mother. An aged Bengali lady, Sarala Devi, who had known Her, presided. She spoke very well, being a person of genuine feeling, after which I gave my first address in the mother tongue. The audience consisted of three hundred women, most of whom did not know English. Fifteen men who were present were terribly disappointed because I did not speak in English. There has been excellent review of this gathering in the local papers.

January 5. The New Year had started auspiciously for us as I judge from my inner feeling. Following a sudden inspiration I launched a New Year's Eve service and reception at Balai's house, where I was then residing. (Mother moves with me wherever I go.) We invited the Ashrama consecrated ladies from both places, (Jadu could not come), our Swamiji's close disciples, and the immediate members of the family, which made up a group of forty persons. We formulated a regular program with prayer, chanting, songs by various ones, ap-

propriate reading and a talk. The children played their part by recitation and dancing. Mother treated everyone with delicious edibles and drink . . . ordered from a special store. The party broke up at about ten, but I did stay up until midnight to greet the New Year. On the morning I woke with a song in my heart, held a little service for the benefit of my sister who has the two handicapped children, read the *Daily Thoughts* lesson and translated them for Mother and her. Doing this almost regularly is greatly helping my practice in Bengali.

I have not said anything about the general conditions in India for the simple reason of wanting to withhold my views until further travel and observation. There is much evidence that disheartens and distresses one. I had hoped to see more improvement in sanitation and living standard after five years of political freedom. The division of India has caused colossal problems, mostly through the migration of refugees. Calcutta is overcrowded, homes are huddled together, in one's own room one is hearing sounds from all directions, and privacy is a luxury people of India have not yet found. Among the intelligentsia there is constant criticism of Nehru for being an idealist but a poor administrator. He is not in touch with the people's need; he talks more than he acts. These are not my opinions, merely repetitions of heard remarks. After I finish my tour of India I expect to call on him and put a few questions in regard to India . . .

There is to be a symposium on *Religion for Modern Man* in the United States Information Service auditorium on January 28. I have been invited to participate in the forum . . .

I steer my bark with hope ahead and fear astern.

— Thomas Jefferson

A TRIBUTE TO HOLY MOTHER

By Sister Daya

(Concluded)

It was during this period, following Sri Ramakrishna's passing, that the Master's disciples began to take in the full significance of a worship their Master had once performed in relation to Sarada Devi, not very long after her arrival at Dakshineswar. It was the day of a great religious festival, dedicated to the Divine Mother, and in Sri Ramakrishna's room preparations had been made for his own private ceremony. When everything was ready and his assistants had withdrawn, he summoned Sarada Devi and asked her to sit on a low, thronelike seat, set apart for the Deity. Then, following the forms of the ritual, he laid flowers at her feet, sprinkled her with blessed water, and bowing before her, he offered himself and the fruit of his whole life to that Infinite Mother, manifesting through her. For one brought up, as she had been, on the great traditions of spiritual India, this act drew forth in her an overwhelming realization of her true origin. From then on, she shone with that realization, which had united her in an unbreakable union with the spiritual being of the Master. Thus, though their outer marriage was never consummated, in this tremendous ceremony, when both were lifted into *Samadhi,* they were made one in the One.

She became now in truth the Holy Mother. Once as she sat at Sri Ramakrishna's feet, she said: "Tell me, what do I represent to you?" He replied: "The Mother of the Infinite Universe, the mother that bore me, that same mother I behold in you." Therefore it was that the disciples, recalling these things, gave utterance to

more than a title of respect when they spoke of her as the Holy Mother. She became really a mother to these young men who had been drawn to the Master and now remained to form the nucleus of his work.

Once a boy, an unknown devotee, sought her counsel. She asked him about himself and about his parents. He told her that both his parents were dead, that he had no one. "Do not be afraid," she said, "You will not be left alone. The Infinite Mother will look after you."

He replied: "Since I have found you, Mother, I feel that I have my mother."

"Yes," she said, "I am your mother."

"Do you say that just as a form of expression, or do you really mean that you are my mother?" he asked.

"I mean," she replied, "that I am really your mother." That was her attitude and conviction.

During Sri Ramakrishna's lifetime, hundreds of devotees came to do him homage. Sometimes they came from great distances, and always Holy Mother was on hand to feed them and to prepare things for their comfort. In later years, during her visits to Jayrambati, her own disciples came on pilgrimages to see her. But Jayrambati lay on the edge of a large expanse of very exposed land, upon which, during the summer, the sun beat with an almost savage fury. For this reason, those who came had to cross this land by night, which meant that they would arrive at the Mother's door in the small hours of the morning. Her rising hour was always three or four A.M., so her hours of sleep were limited. Therefore to be awakened night after night at one or two o'clock was not a light matter. Yet, unfailingly, when the knock came on the door, she would arise, give her guests warm welcome, prepare food for them and see

that they were properly housed and cared for. Moreover, she did this not perfunctorily, not because she had to, but with that fullness of love, that ever-flowing stream of compassion, tenderness and gentleness that were characteristic of her all the years of her life.

In India the people will stand for hours in order to receive the blessing from a holy presence, or what they call *darshan*. They feel that if they have the privilege of prostrating before a great saint, or of standing near him, something will be awakened in them; they will partake a little of his spiritual essence. It was with this feeling that people flocked to the Holy Mother. When a devotee came to visit her, she would speak very little. For the most part, she would stand silent, in her graceful Indian sari, her face somewhat veiled, especially if the visitor were a man; but she would emanate a sort of sublimity as if she were bathed in light.

The "combination of gentleness, dignity and grace gave her that maternal pose which no one who went to her failed to notice. It inspired reverence in one's mind without creating the least sense of inaccessibility. One felt the utmost freedom in her company, but one also got a feeling of elevation and an apprehension that one was before a presence that was something more than merely human. Many a person who went to her with a list of questions felt no inclination to ask them when they were actually before her; for they found their doubts dissolving in the sense of peace and exaltation that her presence conveyed. To restore faith and courage in the wavering, to inspire confidence in the weak, to disperse the clouds of despair and depression, were powers which her personality always carried with it. But all this was not done by any sort of aggressive influence such as we as-

sociate with a militant personality. It was more through that sense of consolation which the loving touch of a mother conveys to an ailing child. For even the most wicked disciple felt that he was near and dear to her, that she had no eye to his failings, that there was no error too grievous for her forgiveness, and that if he would but open his heart, her overflowing sympathy and assurances of divine protection would heal the wounds of his soul . . .

"It was not only the erring and the sinful that found consolation in her love, but even those who were held in dread by society for their wickedness. None was excluded from her motherly sympathy. When her house at Jayrambati was being built, they employed a number of Mohammedans of a neighboring village as laborers. Originally their profession was to grow silkworms, but owing to foreign competition they were thrown out of employment, and they turned to robbing and dacoity as their means of livelihood. So when they were employed for the construction of the Holy Mother's house, there was a regular consternation among the villagers. But afterwards they remarked that through the Mother's grace even these dacoits turned into devotees . . .

"Among these Mohammedans, there was one named Amjed whom the Mother took into her house for a meal. He was seated in the Verandah and Nalini, her niece, was serving him. Owing to caste scruples, Nalini was standing at a little distance from him and throwing the various items of food into his plate. At this the Holy Mother remarked, 'If you serve a person in this way, can he eat with relish? You give the things to me, I shall serve him.' After he had finished eating, the Holy Mother herself washed the place where he had taken food. Nalini

was shocked at this and exclaimed, 'O aunt, you are going to lose caste.' The Holy Mother snubbed her with the remark, 'Keep quiet. Even this Amjed is my son exactly in the sense that Sarat (Swami Saradananda) is!' . . .

"Indeed, this breaking of the bonds of caste consciousness was another achievement of her maternal consciousness. She was not a breaker of caste in the manner of social reformers. For it was never her intention to give a violent shock to anyone by breaking long-established traditions. What happened was that before her maternal love the impediment of narrow rules and restrictions automatically gave way . . .

"The spirit of motherhood thus shone through the various phases of her life and character. In fact her whole life is a revelation of cosmic principle, wherein humanity and divinity meet."*

Judging from all that has been said and written about her, it would seem that Sarada Devi fulfilled the Lord Buddha's ideal when he declared, "As a mother loves her son, her only son, so must our love be for all that lives." No matter from what country people came nor how different they might seem from those to whom she was accustomed, her love flowed equally to them all. They felt — those that received her blessing — that it was not just Sarada Devi who was giving the benediction. They felt that it was the Power which Sri Ramakrishna called the Infinite Mother that was using her as a vehicle for help and strength and illumination.

Wonderingly, I have read her life and pondered over the secret of her character. What was that secret? Was it not perhaps her integrity of spirit? In her there was

*"Sri Sarada Devi," Sri Ramakrishna Math, Mylapore, Madras, India.

no behaviorism; there was no angling for devotion or admiration. There was no trace of egotism about her. Whatever there was of Sarada Devi was offered completely and wholly at the feet of the Divine. There was no Sarada Devi left unoffered to take pride in her offering or to assume power or prerogative because the one who had wed her years before had become a mighty spiritual teacher. The girl who had gone to him when the world considered him mad, in order to protect and sustain him, that same girl when he was acclaimed as a great incarnation of Deity, did not push herself forward and say, "I am his wife. Give *me* honor; acclaim me also!"

Instead, she drew into the background and was content to be nothing in men's eyes — wholly receptive to the light and wisdom which enriched her life. Withal, she was possessed of such uncommon common sense, such freedom of mind, such understanding of human problems that her life mingled naturally with the lives of those around her.

It was said of her that in her own apartment in company with the women disciples who took care of her, she would so eliminate herself that a stranger coming in would often pass her by in favor of one of the others. She never sought to shine, to be marked out as anybody of importance. Whenever someone would seek to thank her for her spiritual help, her illumined words of counsel, she would reply: "It is all through the grace of Thakur (Sri Ramakrishna). I give what has been given me to pass out to you. I have nothing of my own. The Divine Mother makes it possible for me to convey these things to you."

Many, in a similar situation, might say the same thing; might wave away praise and disclaim all credit: "Oh, I

am nothing. What I do is solely through the grace of God!" Have we not heard such statements, and have we not been aware of the play of ego within and behind the words? With the Holy Mother this was not so. With her there was absolute conviction — white truth. She was a vessel filled to the brim with the Divinity she had realized. One cannot draw near her life through the testimony of those who were blessed by actual contact with her or through her own recorded utterances, without sensing the complete purity, the absolute dedication, the utter lack of self and self-consciousness that characterized her.

Sarada Devi moved through her days on earth like a priestess performing holy duties, and these holy duties ranged from actual worship in the shrine to the simple and constant tasks of preparing food for hungry mouths, preparing beds for weary pilgrims, or playing with little children. There was about her the hint of gentle humor. She enjoyed fun and knew how to laugh with life, as all the Great Ones do. She was like a star. Somehow as I have thought of her these days, I have seen her shining before me, and this inward vision conveys her reality more than any recorded fact, more than all that has been said or written about her. She shines! She is living and real — so actual in fact, that any heart really yearning to slough off inertia, selfishness and egotism, in turning to her must feel cleansed by her pure flame, must be aware of the Holy Mother's redeeming presence.

Her very name, Saradamani, the "Jewel that gives forth its essence," seems descriptive of her. She was indeed a jewel of pure luster. Yet to us of the dizzy, outward-turning West, her life may seem too far removed from practical everyday facts to be of value to the

Occident. As a Hindu, she followed a pattern of thought and aspiration totally different from our way of living. The average young American, for instance, upon reading her life, with its dedication, its one-pointed unwavering faith in an all-encompassing, ever-present Deity, its hours and hours of divine contemplation, would be apt to exclaim, "This is of another world than ours. It sounds more like Biblical days. It can hold nothing for us!"

If we should react in this way it would be our misfortune. Sarada Devi's life holds the healing for so many of our ills. If there is one thing we need above all else it is to be cleansed of the extraneous, the complicated and the non-essential; of all, in fact, that clogs and hampers our inner being. How many things obscure the clear and shining light of Spirit! Far indeed are we from the faith which springs from direct perception. Those who know with simple vision that that Power alone is, and seek to serve It and their fellow beings with no thought of return, even though they may not display any intellectual brilliancy, are the true saviors of their fellow men. They alone bring direct testimony of a world of beauty and truth of which our modern material civilization knows not.

Thus we see Sri Ramakrishna and the Holy Mother standing like the angel with the flaming sword, before the gateway leading to a higher realm of consciousness — the inner heart of things — where all is peace and beauty and wholeness, where the many melt into the One. By following the simple, fundamental teachings that they give, we too might cut through the bonds that bind us, the troubles that shadow us, the confusion that bewilders us.

For those who sought refuge with Holy Mother, there

was always the basic command: "Worship the One, offer everything on the altar of that worship." One who does that cannot lose out, cannot go wrong, for he will then know by direct experience, not through the experience of others. The Holy Mother herself had gone by that path. She was not, as some may imagine, merely the reflection of Sri Ramakrishna. Her teaching was not just a parrot-like repetition of what he had taught her. It had its rise in her own realization. She was not just a moon, reflecting the sun's glory. She, too, was a sun in her own right. Sri Ramakrishna's great gift to her, it would seem, was in the nature of a conveyance of spiritual power, a stimulation of her own inward vision, so that she herself was able to touch eternal Truth and become Its vehicle.

I have said that her outward expression of that Truth was purely Hindu. The rituals and forms were no doubt Hindu, and her way of living; yet, with the deeply illumined, the outer manifestation is a superficial thing. Where the One Light is reached, and the One Truth realized, where character shines like an undimmed jewel in the heart of the Servant of God, all national and creedal barriers fall away.

Sarada Devi belongs to the world, as does her great Lord and Master, Sri Ramakrishna. There have been others down the ages, the pure and the blessed, who represented the same universal Spirit. There is no contest, no rivalry at the Center. These divine manifestations are one — one Glory, one Love, one Truth. In our need, a particular saint or savior may seem more immediate than does some other. But back of them all, irradiating them all as their Essence and Power, is the Infinite Mother, the Infinite Father, the eternal Godhead Itself.

Sarada Devi is a treasure for the West as well as for the East. By virtue of her mother-heart, she reaches the heart of America, of Europe, of far away lands where simple, primitive folk follow their homely ways. Everywhere that mother-spirit must find its home in devout and yearning souls. As we remember her, automatically our minds are drawn away from the turmoil of the world about us. Her beautiful, serene and majestic being rises before our inner eyes, and we feel exalted, comforted and rededicated to our own particular Ideal.

It is true that against her life of complete consecration, our lives will often appear shoddy, useless, selfish and small. Yet her gaze was never focused on these negative things, but always on the positive and the good. Thus, thinking of her, even in the midst of darkness, we shall find hope; we shall take comfort in her love, and in the fact of her existence. She was more than just a beautiful and gentle woman; she was one who was lofty with the loftiness of the Divine. There was about her something not of this earth, something higher than heaven — the consciousness of the Eternal. Therefore she is destined to stand, benign, smiling, wise, gentle and strong, as a beacon light for generations yet unborn.

Get the mercy of God and of His greatest children . . . The company of these children of light is very hard to get. Five minutes in their company will change a whole life, and if you really want it enough, one will come to you. The presence of those who love God makes a place holy. "Such is the glory of the children of the Lord." They are He; and when they speak, their words are scriptures. The place where they have been becomes filled with their vibrations, and those going there feel them.

— *Swami Vivekananda*

SOCRATES - SAINT AND MYSTIC

By P. H.

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Within the space of about five hundred years the world brought forth Buddha, Laotzu, Confucius, Socrates and Christ. The first three established the cultural and spiritual framework of the East which has lasted into the twentieth century, while Socrates and Christ have been scarcely less influential in moulding Western thought and civilization. If "great" has any meaning, these were great figures in history. And yet how absurdly little is known about any of them.

When Socrates quietly drained a cup of hemlock in his condemned cell in 399 B. C. he left behind him no writings, no disciples and no system of philosophy. He flashed like a comet across the Grecian sky and but a few cold sparks of his living brilliance have been preserved by the genius of Plato and in the writings of others who wondered at the sight. Xenophon, who admired Socrates as a person, allows us some insight into his character. Plato, in the poetic masterpieces of his dialogues, brings us closest to his moral and intellectual flame. Aristophanes gives us a caricature as valid as, say, a David Low cartoon of Lord Beaverbrook. If this pre-Pauline sage was a "triple alliance of body, mind and spirit," Aristophanes saw little more than his physical grotesqueness, Xenophon scarcely penetrated deeper than the more superficial and easily recognizable traits of his personality, and only Plato was aware of the light of the spirit which burnt within the ill-proportioned frame. Even taken together, and they complement one another to some

degree, their writings do not give the whole picture. Remember that Plato and Xenophon were both more than forty years younger than Socrates. When they were old enough to know, they knew an old man; they can tell us little, and in consequence little is known, of his early life. More important, Plato would write nothing of the esoteric teaching which Socrates reserved for the inner circle of his acquaintances:

"There is not, nor will there ever be, any writing of mine dealing with these matters. For such things cannot be expressed in words like other objects of study, but as a result of continued application to the subject and living with it, a light as if from a leaping fire is of a sudden kindled in the soul, and nourishes itself there." (Epistle VII. 531.)[1]

Plato goes on to explain that he fully realizes the inestimable benefit to mankind which would result from a true appreciation of these secret teachings, but nevertheless they cannot be made public because they would be misunderstood and brought into contempt by the many.

* * * * *

Whatsoever a great man does, the same is also done by others. Whatsoever standard he sets, the world follows. (Gita III. 21.)

The child was born, probably in 470 B. C., in an Athens still enthused and exalted by the heady victory over the Persian hordes which had attempted to overrun Greece a few years before. He grew up in the "Elizabethan age" of Athens to witness the swift accretion of her maritime empire; and he lived to see defeat and disintegration come upon her as punishment fitting her *hubris*. His father, Sophroniscus, was a well-to-do gentleman. His mother, Phaenerete enjoyed the reputation of being

1 Compare the similar passage in the second Epistle.

a skilful midwife, and this bit of family gossip evidently became widely known and provided the local wits with several good and less-good jokes. Socrates refers to it himself in the *Theatetus* and Aristophanes jests about it in *The Clouds*, a satire produced in 423 B. C. with Socrates as the central figure of fun. It is clear that, even without the assistance of anything akin to the "build-up" given by modern newspaper publicity to people in the public eye, he was a well-known figure in Athens during the golden age of Pericles when the cream of the Greek world flocked to the Attic capital.

We can imagine this dumpy personage with features attracting attention, a snub nose set over a broad mouth under rather prominent eyes, walking with a few friends towards the market-place. One of his companions, a rather hot-tempered fellow, is too annoyed by the rudeness of an acquaintance on the other side of the street to return his salutation. Socrates turns to him with a slight smile and says: "It is an odd thing that, if you had met a man ill-conditioned in body, you would not have been angry; but to have met a man rudely disposed in mind provokes you." Some way further on they come upon a slave being harshly beaten by his master. Socrates goes up to him and asks why he is punishing the lad. "Because he is very gluttonous and very stupid, very covetous and very idle," replies the man. "And have you ever reflected," rejoins Socrates, "which of the two deserves the greater number of stripes, you or your slave?"[1] A crowd gathers round to hear him discussing the nature of "justice" with a sophist. His method is to ask the sophist to explain what he means when he uses the word "justice," and to question him on his definition. He

1 Xenophon Mem. 3. 13.

shows that the loose and "popular" definition given is ill thought-out and full of flaws, so that it must needs be abandoned and a better one found.

Merely to be in the company of Socrates is a blessing.[1] He is ever ready to listen to all and to talk to all, women as well as men. He accepts truth from the four quarters and publishes it to the four quarters.

He spends day after day in the same way,questioning, discussing, offering help and advice to the many friends who bring to him their personal problems. He had been convinced from his earliest years that God meant him to pass his time in this way, and his private means and few personal needs allow him to do so. Later in life, it is true, he became very poor, but this was due to having devoted all his resources to his "mission," and to his resolute refusal to soil himself with the mud of politics. "I am in very great poverty," he claimed at his trial, "by reason of my service to God." He was convinced that God had sent him as "a gadfly" to rouse his fellow-citizens to turn to self-improvement, and he allowed neither poverty, ignominy nor fear of death to stand in the way:

"Athenians, I hold you in the highest regard and love; but I will obey God rather than you; and as long as I have breath and strength I will not cease from philosophy, and from exhorting you, and declaring the truth to every one of you whom I meet, saying as I am wont 'My excellent friend, you are a citizen of Athens, a city which is very great and very famous for wisdom and power of mind; are you not ashamed of caring so much for the making of money and for reputation and for honour? Will you not think or care about wisdom, and truth, and the perfection of your soul?'" (Apology 29.)

1 Loc. Cit. 4. I. I.

O Krishna, how does the man of steady knowledge speak, how does he sit, how does he walk? (Gita II. 54.)

Socrates' personal wants were very small and for the barest necessities. He ate little and drank little. He wore the same single garment in winter and summer, and walked barefooted even in the coldest weather. To his friends he recommended self-restraint without asceticism, and advocated the performance of self-denial as a means to the refinement of the mind. His prescription for practical living was summed up in the word *sophrosyne* (moderation).[1] Once a sophist stopped him in the street to sneer at his poverty and frugal mode of life: "I thought philosophy was supposed to make men happy, and just look at how you live!" Socrates answered him that not material pleasures but freedom from desires brings happiness:

"Do you not know that he who eats with the most pleasure is he who least requires sauce, and that he who drinks with the greatest pleasure is he who least desires other drink than that which he has? . . . You, Antipho, resemble one who thinks that happiness consists in luxury and extravagance; but I think that to want nothing is to resemble God, and to want as little as possible is to make the nearest approch to God; that the divine nature is Perfection, and that to be nearest to the divine nature is to be nearest to Perfection." [2]

Socrates had received the usual elementary education in music and gymnastics, which aimed at producing health and balance in the body and "harmony" in the mind. He was also well grounded in the science of the time. He did not hold with unscientific speculations and

1 Cf. Bhagavad Gita VI. 16 and 17.
2 Xenophon Mem. 1. 6. 10.

discouraged dabblers in contemporary theosophy with the warning that they would be "in danger of losing their minds."[1] During his military service as an infantryman in the Athenian army, his courage and powers of endurance became a byword. Throughout his life, nothing was able to daunt him or turn him from a course which he considered to be right or held to be his duty. There was the occasion when his lone voice stood out against the hasty and unconstitutional decision of the Athenian assembly to execute the generals after the naval battle of Arginusae; there was the refusal, at the risk of his life, to be implicated in the wicked murder of Leon by the Thirty Tyrants; there was his calm rejection of the plan made for his escape from prison after his trial and condemnation. Perhaps the most remarkable description of Socrates in the Platonic dialogues is the one put into the mouth of the gifted Alcibiades in the *Symposium.* He likens Socrates to the statue of a satyr, ungainly of exterior but found to contain the images of gods when opened up. He describes the electric effect that Socrates' words have upon himself and other hearers, words that go straight to the heart and cling there. To listen to his talk, even though he is not practicing his rhetorical skill, is to be aware of a strong emotional response:

" . . . for when I hear him speak, my heart leaps up far more than the hearts of those who celebrate the Corybantic mysteries; my tears are poured out as he talks, a thing I have seen happen to many others besides myself."

Alcibiades confesses that Socrates has the unique and discomforting power of making him feel ashamed of himself and determined to reform, and it is only when he leaves him for the society of the worldly people that his good resolutions are forgotten:

1 Xenophon Mem. 4. 7. 6.

"He lives among men, making all the objects of their admiration the playthings of his irony. But I know not if any one of you have ever seen the divine images which are within, when he has been opened, and is serious. I have seen them, and they are so supremely beautiful, so golden, so divine, and wonderful, that everything that Socrates commands surely ought to be obeyed, even like the voice of a God." (Sym. 215.)

In the Louvre the bust of Socrates gazes meditatively, fixedly at the Venus de Milo, as if the grotesque satyr were materializing by his will the outer symbol of his inner Beauty.

* * * * *

Sir, is there anything better than meditation?
(Chandogya Upanishad 7. 6. 2.)

One of the two charges against Socrates in 399 B. C. was "neglect of the Gods whom the city worships and novel practices in religion," and we can perhaps see in it a hit at the mystic teaching which he gave to a narrow circle of intimates. To say that Socrates had no disciples is not to deny that we can distinguish from the collection of parasitical admirers and hangers-on an inner coterie to whom he taught mysticism, while continuing to preach Virtue in the outer court. Such men were Crito and Chaerephon and Plato himself; and they included not only Athenians but nationals of states which fought against Athens during the long and bitter Peloponnesian War, men like Eucleides of Megara and the two Pythagoreans from Thebes, Cebes and Simmias. These and others of like mind attached themselves to Socrates not for worldly advantage but "to learn how to become honourable and good men."[1] In *The Clouds* Aristophanes

1 Xenophon Mem. 1. 2. 48.

burlesques the "thinking-shop" of Socrates where the sage coaches his pupils in secret mumbo-jumbo and meditation. Nevertheless, it seems doubtful whether Socrates was in any sense a Teacher (*Acharya*) who transmitted a mystic doctrine and tradition, which he himself had received, to a line of successors. There is, certainly, a suggestion that he received initiation from Archelaus, the Athenian successor of Anaxagoras; and there is his own emphasis on the importance of a Teacher. He used to maintain that, just as you would go to a skilled shoemaker in order to learn how to make shoes, so you should go to a morally and spiritually perfect man to learn ethics and religion.[1] On the other hand, he specifically disclaimed having any disciples, nor did any of his followers claim to have received a mandate from him. Moreover, he never seems to have referred to a human teacher and from childhood felt himself to be divinely inspired from within:

"He said that the divinity within him was his guide. He also told many of his friends to do certain things and not to do others, intimating that the divinity had forewarned him; and advantage attended those who obeyed his suggestions but repentance those who disregarded them." (Xenophon Mem. 1. 1. 4.)

That Socrates was liable to withdraw into a trance (samadhi) was a fact well known to his contemporaries, and Aristophanes makes great play with it in *The Clouds*. Plato tells how one day Aristodemus and Socrates were on the way to a banquet when Socrates dropped behind and asked his friend to go on. The host and other guests waited so long that in the end they sent a servant to look for him. The servant soon returned to report that Socrates had retired into the portico of a neighboring house:

1 Cf. Crito 47.

"There he is fixed," said he, "and when I call to him he will not stir." "How strange," said Agathon, "then you must call him again and keep calling him." "Let him alone," said my informant, "he has a way of stopping anywhere and losing himself without any reason. I believe that he will soon appear; do not, therefore, disturb him." (Sym. 175.)

An even more remarkable incident occurred when Socrates was on military service with the Athenian army at Potidaea.

"In one instance he was seen early in the morning, standing in one place, wrapt in meditation; and as he seemed unable to unravel the subject of his thoughts, he still continued to stand as if inquiring and discussing within himself, and when noon came, the soldiers observed him, and said to one another: 'Socrates has been standing there thinking, ever since the morning.' At last some Ionians came to the spot, and having supped, as it was summer, they lay down to sleep in the cool: they observed that Socrates continued to stand there the whole night until morning, and that, when the sun rose, he saluted it with a prayer and departed." (Sym. 220.)

* * * * *

Lead me from the unreal to the real!
Lead me from darkness to light!
Lead me from death to immortality!
(Brihadaranyaka Upanishad 1. 3. 27.)

How far Plato's philosophy is directly traceable to Socrates is a matter for conjecture. There are good grounds for believing that the rough diamonds were supplied by Socrates, and that Plato's self-appointed task was the cutting and polishing. It would in any event be wrong to suppose that Socrates was no more than a bril-

liant logician who went about making his opponents and their ideas look foolish in argument. Such a view would not explain his influence upon his contemporaries or the still fragrant grandeur of his memory. He had something *positive* to give — that is the secret. The "Socratic question" was a way of clearing away the stubble and weeds to allow the planting and growth of the seed. It aimed among other things at inducing the practice of self-examination and reflection — the *vichara* of Adwaita. If the emphasis of the Socratic technique inclines towards the negation of wrong values, this may partly be attributable to the spiritual wilderness into which the saint was born, where the probings of the leading thinkers into the nature of matter struggled ideologically for the adherence of human beliefs with lazy superstitions about licentious Gods. The cry of Socrates was: "Turn within! Cease to worry about the body and the demands it makes, and care for your soul (psyche)."[1] This care (therapeia) of the soul was not a mere sharpening of the mental faculties so that they might the better compete in the external arena of sense-objects with worldly advantage as the prize; nor was it the pumping in of "knowledge" from human teachers or books. It meant a turning inward of the energy and interest which had for long been devoted to outer pursuits and, through the planned use of this energy, the uncovering of the knowledge within, which had come to be overlaid with ignorance. It follows that true knowledge cannot be fully expressed in any dogma, and that a Teacher's duty is not to impress any particular theory on the pupil but to help him discover what already lies within him. "God compels me to be a midwife," says Socrates in the *Theatetus,* "but He does not allow me to have children."

1 Cf. Phaedrus 230.

Socrates produced no neat philosophic system, he raised no tier of metaphysical pigeon-holes. He spoke and acted from an unmoving and therefore self-consistent centre of personal conviction from which his thoughts radiated out like spokes from the hub of a wheel. In each main line of thought, too, it is the core of intuitive certainty which convinces rather than the dialectical peel; a good example of this is the discussion on the immortality of the soul in the *Phaedo*. The grounding of his thought in experience is also reflected in the practical aim of his teachings, namely the evolution of the soul through self-discipline and ethical living to Perfection. The simile of the Cave at the beginning of the seventh book of the *Republic* is a symbolic account of the stages of this evolution and the goal is there referred to as "The Form of the Good." It is—

"that which imparts truth to the things that are known and the power of knowing to the knower." (Republic 508.)

"It is eternal; uncreated, indestructible, subject neither to increase nor decay; not like other things, partly beautiful and partly ugly; not beautiful at one time or in one relation or in one place, and deformed at other times, in other relations and in other places; not beautiful in the opinion of some and ugly in the opinion of others. It is not to be imagined as a beautiful face or form or as any part of the body, or in the likeness of speech or knowledge; it does not have its being in any living thing or in the sky or the earth or any other place. It is Beauty Absolute, separate, simple, and everlasting which, without diminution and without increase or any change, is imparted to the ever growing and perishing beauties of all other things." (Sym. 202.)

Knowledge is enveloped by ignorance; thereby mortals are deluded. (Gita V. 15.)

If Plato's indebtedness to Socrates is difficult to assess, so also is the influence on Socrates of the "Eastern ideas" which he absorbed through the Pythagoreans, the Eleatics and other sources. The doctrine of Reincarnation and the immortality of the soul, the "caste" system of Plato's Republic in which every citizen does that for which he is best fitted ("follows his own dharma," in the language of the Gita) afford obvious points of similarity. Much Platonic imagery comes startlingly close to that used in the classics of Vedanta; this for instance—

"Now imagine that a man were to model all possible figures out of gold, and were then to proceed without stopping to remodel each of these into all the rest; then if someone points to one of them and asks what it is, by far the safest and truest answer is 'It is gold!'"

(Timaeus 50.)[1]

The conception that everything in the universe results from the fusion of an unchanging and a changing element gives rise to the Platonic (and, almost certainly, Socratic) theory of Forms, which bears a superficial resemblance to the Adwaita view of the play of phenomenal names and forms on the substratum of Consciousness (Chit). There is much that is obscure in Plato's statement of the theory, particularly in regard to the relationship of Forms to each other and to the Form of the Good. In rejecting all suggestion of a hierarchy of eternal Forms which are in any sense to be considered real, and in carrying the doctrine of phenomenality (vivarta) to its logical conclusion, the Adwaita represents an altogether clearer-cut position. It also supplies in the stark,

1 Cf. Chandogya Upanishad VI. 1. 5.

direct phrases of "That thou art" and "Verily this Self is Brahman" a statement of the spiritual truth which is not found in the utterances of Socrates, whose highest and transcendent Ideal is still tinged with the colours of duality.

When Socrates speaks of virtue (arete) he uses the word in the Greek sense of the "excellence" of a thing. The function of a pen is to write and its "virtue" consists in writing well. The "virtue" of the soul consists in carrying out its function of knowing at the highest pitch of efficiency. When Socrates affirmed that virtue was knowledge, he did not mean to deny the moral struggle in man or to excuse vice. But if a man acts wrongly and immorally (he would have argued), he is doing something unnatural and against his own best interests, and he will have to pay a heavy price in the end: in such a case, is it reasonable to suppose that the man really *knows* what the implications of his action will be, and does he not rather half believe through ignorance that he will extract some measure of good for himself from the experience? "Virtue is knowledge" is, indeed, a reasonable deduction from the facts that a man in a certain sense always does what he wishes, and that he wishes what is good and not what is bad for himself. The ultimate aim of the moral life is thus the uncovering of the last layer of ignorance and the discovery by the purified and "virtuous" mind of —

"the very Being with which true Knowledge is concerned — the colourless formless intangible essence."

(Phaedrus 247.)

* * * * *

O Arjuna, having attained to Me, the great souls do not again take birth in suffering. (Gita VIII. 15.)

The trial of Socrates took place in 399 B. C. before a "jury" of 501 Athenians. He was found guilty by a majority of 281 votes to 220 and condemned to death. To assign causes to historical events is always an uncertain proceeding and depends not a little on the level at which the "cause" is sought. Like other prominent citizens who have refused to take sides in politics, Socrates tended to be identified by the Government of the day as a supporter of the Opposition. It is usually accepted that the restored democratic leaders aimed at ridding themselves of him by frightening him into exile, and that they would not have pressed for the death sentence if Socrates had exercised his option of proposing exile as an alternative penalty at his trial. Be this as it may, we sense, if we go deeper, the inevitability of his martyrdom, the crystallization of the hate of lesser men whose moral worthlessness he exposes. Intuitively they recognize that his is an ideal to which they may not aspire. The shouts of "Destroy him! Crucify him!" sounded also in the ears of Christ and Al Hallaj.

Socrates treated the charges against him with a contempt as supreme as the equanimity with which he accepted the court's verdict. The death sentence would normally have been carried out within twenty-four hours, but owing to the celebrations of a religious ceremony during which it was forbidden to put anyone to death in Athens, it had to be postponed. Thus Socrates passed a whole month in prison, where he was visited by friends and by his wife and three sons, one of whom was only a small baby. The last day is beautifully described in the *Phaedo*. Xanthippe and the children are sent away. The discussion centres around the immortality of the soul and is only interrupted when the gaoler brings in the cup of

poison. Socrates' friends are much more moved than he. Some burst into tears and are admonished. He drinks the hemlock and walks round the room until his legs become too heavy and he is obliged to lie down:

"He was already growing cold about the groin when he uncovered his face which had been covered, and spoke for the last time. 'Crito,' he said, 'I owe a cock to Asclepius; do not forget to pay it.' 'It shall be done,' replied Crito. 'Is there anything else that you wish?' He made no answer to this question, but after a short interval there was a movement, and the man uncovered him, and his eyes were fixed. Then Crito closed his mouth and his eyes. Such was the end, Echecrates, of our friend, a man, I think, who was the wisest and the justest, and the best man I have ever known."

Asclepius is the God of health to whom an offering is made on recovery from an illness. Crito is a rich man who had often contributed towards Socrates' needs. He is one of the closest, perhaps the closest of all, to Socrates. It was he who visited Socrates in prison to try to persuade him to escape; it is he who now performs the last offices. The meaning of Socrates' last words will not have been lost on him.

Somebody said to Socrates that a certain man had not in any way been improved by his travels. "I quite believe it," he replied; "he took himself along with him."

Moreover, though we are rid of the court and the market place, . . . ambition, avarice, irresolution, fear, and the lusts do not leave us, though we have changed our country. They will often follow us even into the cloister and the school of philosophy. Neither deserts, nor rocky caves, nor hair-shirts, nor fastings will rid us of them.

—Michel de Montaigne

THE ANANDA ASHRAMA AT COHASSET

By Dorothy Dengler

What is the Ananda Ashrama? The Ananda Ashrama is a haven of peace for rest and relaxation, for living, in its intrinsic sense. The Ananda Ashrama is a wooded vale, a home among the scented pines and warm and friendly rocks. Here one discovers or perhaps rediscovers the true values of life; worldly cares and problems are replaced by spiritual inspiration; and one's own real self is freed to commune with the Divine.

Off Beechwood Street in Cohasset is the twenty-four acre estate which constitutes the Vedanta retreat. As we enter under the wooden archway and travel down the winding road, we begin to feel a calm sense of security. Petty worries and heavy burdens gradually drop from our confused and cluttered minds. The outside world with all its noise, problems and conflicts fades away in the distance and is soon forgotten. Serenity reigns with Truth and Beauty; time is infinite; values eternal, everlasting.

The road leads first to the lower house where Gayatri Devi and the women members of the community live. Here we have our meals either inside before the glass enclosed front overlooking the colorful garden or out at the side of the house underneath an archway of wistaria vine. The Ashrama garden is a friendly one, bright with red and yellow gladioli, dark blue bachelor buttons, orange and yellow nasturtiums, white shasta daisies and purple cosmos, as well as many other varieties in multicolored hues. Visitors to the garden are many: Goldfinch and bluejay, oriole and thrush come to take their daily bath or look for a worm or two, while the humming

bird investigates each colorful flower and the scarlet tanager flies to and fro. Bees and vari-colored butterflies flit from blossom to blossom as rabbit and chipmunk blaze their trail in among the leafy stems.

Proceeding along the winding road through the woods, we come to the upper house or guest house, securely fastened to a huge gray boulder on a level with the tree tops. Opposite the guest house in the valley below, is the vegetable garden, where much of the food for the household is grown.

A typical day at the Ashrama could be described as follows: The bell for morning worship rings at 8:15. Service is often held on the upper rock just back of the guest house. One by one the members of the household and guests arrive and sit Buddha-fashion or in any comfortable position on the spacious rock high among the tree tops. Soon through the woods comes the strain of an ancient Sanscrit hymn. The Devi Gayatri appears bearing fragrant sandalwood incense from India and takes her place before the devotees.

As each one silently meditates and communes with God and nature about him, the birds of the forest gather around singing their morning hymns, some bursting forth with the theme, others chanting the chorus. Now comes the sweet scent of pine, now a whiff of sandalwood as the Divine Presence pervades the atmosphere, giving an air of sanctity to all about. A Hindu chant, a prayer, a passage from the Gita and a few wise words start the day afresh. On other days, service is held in the shrine at the lower house where offerings of fruit and flowers are placed before exalted spirits of all faiths.

Breakfast is served at the lower house and then each to his daily chores — the guests to wander at will.

At noon, there is an hour of silence followed by service down in the shade of the pine covered valley. Meditation at noon brings refreshment to the soul, a reaffirmation of faith, a rededication to the ideal, strength to go on. Then comes lunch under the wistaria vine by the side of the house — sandwiches, fruit, ginger ale, nuts and sweets.

Now we have a few hours to take a sun bath on the upper rock or a siesta on a soft bed of pine needles underneath the shady boughs. This is the time we have to ourselves to contemplate, to ponder on subjects brought up in discussion, to search the soul, to find out what we are, the path we aim to follow. Do we plan for the future or think about the past in the outside world, whence we came and to which we must return? No, here there is no future and the past is completely obliterated. All is one eternal now — a pleasant existence, living each moment for itself alone.

As the sun slowly descends into the western horizon, devotees gather once more for afternoon service in the woodland sanctuary before a cobblestone altar, surmounted by the figure OM, symbol of the universal spirit of God. One meditates here on the true, the good, and the beautiful and gazes far off through the forest glade, swept clear of undergrowth, covered only by sun-browned pine needles. One might expect to see a fairy or elf come forth to frolic as the sunlight flickers through the trees making lacy patterns all about and the birds chirp merrily with the *"joie de vivre,"* for surely the place is enchanted!

Occasionally amidst high inspiring thoughts comes the blare of an auto horn or the roar of an airplane, breaking the spell for a brief instant to remind us that there is a world outside, a world of rush and noise and turmoil, but

soon come words of wisdom and insight from the high priestess and the response from the devotees to assure us that here at least is peace, quiet and serenity.

The delicious dinner now served at the lower house is often an Indian meal, cooked by Gayatri Devi herself, delicately flavored with spices and herbs. After dinner when the dishes are cleared away and twilight descends, we all go up to the upper house on the large screen-enclosed veranda. At this time, many a lofty ideal is explained and discussed, many a worldly or philosophical problem is reviewed and analyzed, ideas are clarified, minds enlightened. A cup of tea to placate the body and then to bed. Such is life at Ananda Ashrama.

When the time comes that we must leave, we begin to wonder: Has life here been real or has it been merely a pleasant dream, a brief respite from worldly cares? At any rate as we go back reluctantly into the outside world, we go with a body refreshed, a mind serene, a spirit rededicated to the good and the true.

(Within the last year, the Cohasset Ashrama has become the all-year-round home of the former Vedanta Centre of Boston. Under the able direction of Gayatri Devi, buildings have been enlarged and many other necessary changes have taken place in order to insure space and comfort for the permanent community, as well as for visiting friends. What has not been altered is the charm, the beauty and the spiritual atmosphere of this sylvan retreat. On June 1, coincident with Gayatri Devi's return from her Indian tour, the summer season was opened at the Ashrama. During the summer months, friends from many parts will be drawn to this lovely spot, "sacred by its own virtue," to enjoy an experience such as Miss Dengler describes in her article—Editor.)

Why should we live with such hurry and waste of life? . . . When we are unhurried and wise, we perceive that only great and worthy things have any permanent and absolute existence, that petty fears and petty pleasures are but the shadow of the reality.

— Henry David Thoreau

FROM A DISCIPLE'S NOTEBOOK

(Continued from the Spring issue)

Less than six months after Charushila Devi's departure for India, a small news item appeared in the monthly report of the *"Message of the East."* It ran as follows:

"Charushila Devi, who assisted Swami Paramananda at the Boston Centre for two years and who returned to India last October, has opened a branch of Ananda Ashrama at Dacca, Bengal, India."

A simple statement with tremendous implications! Little Charudi to start an Indian Ananda Ashrama, single-handed and without any financial assets? Surely her enthusiasm had carried away her practical sense. To state it plainly, something akin to consternation reigned at the California Ashrama and at the Centre in Boston. Her American brothers and sisters loved Charushila Devi dearly; they did not doubt her ability or her dedication; they merely questioned her wisdom in undertaking something which she had not the means to carry through, and which they feared would throw a heavy responsibility upon the already overburdened shoulders of the Swami.

If he shared their fears, the Swami did not show it, though undoubtedly his concern was deep for this adventurous child of his spirit. Maybe he had expressed to her at some time a wish for this very thing that she had done, for his dreams ranged far afield. Maybe, also, he knew what the others did not yet know but which they were destined to learn with the passing of the years, that Charushila possessed that most rare combination of mystic insight and the power of accomplishment, plus intense devotion and an unwavering faith.

Soon after the first announcement, there was published in the *Message* a general appeal addressed by Charushila Devi to all people everywhere. In this, she outlined the nature of her mission, India's need for this type of service, and her own need for cooperation and support. "The Ashrama," she wrote, "is for women of all standing — literate, illiterate, married, unmarried, widowed; with no limitation of caste or creed. It is for girls bred and brought up in comfort, also for girls who are helpless, with nothing and nobody in this world. Our aspiration is to find a loving shelter for them all, to mold the character, to increase the strength of mind, to expand the intellect, and to make them stand on their own feet.

"The Ashrama is based on lines of 'plain living and high thinking,' so every unnecessary detail has been rejected from this home.

"The Ashrama shrine is a place where people of every faith may feel spiritual aspiration, its motto being: 'Truth is One, men call It by various names!' from the Rig Veda.

"To make the girls self-supporting, the Ashrama is giving different kinds of vocational training. There is also the Ashrama School where girls are learning English, mathematics, Bengali, history and geography. Two other departments, one for babies and another for old incapable women are absolutely necessary in order that we may take in widows with children.

"Any kind of love offering will be accepted with hearty thanks. Orders for printed saris, curtains, table cloths, tray covers; also matches or any kind of ready-made garment will be gladly supplied."

These were brave words, but in this case they were followed by brave deeds. In spite of struggle and every kind of obstacle, the Ashrama moved steadily forward

on its appointed path. Lack of money, famine, illness, war — nothing seemed able to divert it from its goal. The very spirit with which it was imbued drew the attention of educators, and even the Government of India gave recognition in the form of a small subsidy. M. Azizul Hoque, Minister in charge of Education, Government of Bengal, wrote with great appreciation of the Ashrama and its educational methods. "Charushila Devi," he said, "is to be highly congratulated, not only for her sacrifice, but also for her splendid institution which can be a model in every sense of the term. I was indeed surprised that such an institution exists in this province."

The word sacrifice was well used, because it is on sacrifice that the Ashrama has been built. Hence its power to preserve the ideal and to endure. Not the terrible grind of uncertainty, not constant hard work nor endless deprivations have been able to bring it down to the dead level of a mechanical institution. Founded in the name of Swami Paramananda, by one close to the heart of his ideal, it has been able to preserve his vision.

Naturally, from the very start, his hand was outstretched in aid. He did what he could, but the fact that he stood behind her spiritually meant more to Charushila than any mere material endowment could have meant. With his blessing to sustain her, she felt that she could not fail. Her American friends also contributed from time to time individually, and responded eagerly as a body when invited by the Swami to a benefit banquet or an entertainment given in her name in either Boston or La Crescenta. A light verse, written many years ago, but which to this time has not seen the light of day, reflects fairly accurately the joyous excitement which always prevailed when the Swami and his helpers made ready for such an occasion:

At the Centre all is bustle,
Ladies straining nerve and muscle,
Pounding spice,
Washing rice,
Paring, cutting, grinding, grating
(While the steaming pots are waiting)
Cocoanut and ripe banana
From the islands of *manana.*
Fat potatoes from Dakota,
Eggplant, p'raps from Minnesota,
Carrot, cauliflower, onion,
Codfish, halibut or grunion.
All the while the Swami, stirring,
Keeps the bubbling kettle purring.
Oh, it's petticoats a-rustle,
And it's hustle, hustle, hustle!
But not Swami,
He keeps calm; he
Stands there quiet, smiling, funning
While the busy feet are running.
While the phone is ringing, ringing
And the doorbell dinging, dinging
He stands cooking fragrant dishes,
Made of vegetables or fishes,
Flavoring them with blessed wishes
That success may crown the dinner
And his venture prove a winner
For the work across the sea.
And that work, what can it be?
Wherefore all this hustle bustle,
All this eager rush and tussle?
Is it, say, for charity?
Guess again! Not charity!
For what, then?
For Charudi!
For our little Charudi!

In grateful response, Charushila Devi sought through letters to bridge the distance which separates her from her Western friends and to keep them in living touch with the activities and the details pertaining to her new undertaking.

"The girls who have come here to us are all of good family," she wrote, "but most of them are without any education. Poverty and helplessness! It is as if these things had robbed the humanity in them, but now on every face we see a smile . . . In the children's class we shall also take boys. We shall gradually have to remove the terrible barrier of sex division — a great impediment.

"We all rise at 5:00 a. m. The girls clean the whole building, wash and sweep, then they cook, cut vegetables, prepare spices and wash the dishes. From 6:30 to 7:00 we have our worship. After worship I read from Swami's book of *Daily Thoughts and Prayers* (translating it for them) and from the *Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna.* Whatever comes spontaneously, I speak to them. At about 7:30 we have our breakfast. Then they study for about an hour after which they go to their specific duties. At 10:30 we make the offering in the shrine, and at noon the school begins and continues for three hours. From 4:00 to 6:00 in the afternoon they have the lesson from the tailor or singing lesson from the singing master, and at 6:00 p. m. we have our meal. After our meal we take a little walk in the garden or have a little game or recreation. We have our evening worship at about 9:00 o'clock. After evening worship they study and at about 10:00 we all retire.

"Please do not think I am overworking. I am not working for anything else except just to serve my ideal, and that kind of work always brings new life.

"Recently, a Baptist missionary and some men and women came; they were looking for a house. The gardener told them this house was rented and they went away, but they wanted to raise the rent. The landlord was not able to resist the temptation and he brought them

one day. With a smile on my face, I showed them the whole house, then I told them that we were all engaged in the same work in the Lord's service, that our work is really one, therefore we should have understanding love between ourselves, and cooperation. Then they said they would not take that house, even if he removed us from the place. And not only that, they have tried to have affiliation. They invited us to tea one day. Two or three times they have called on me. When they come, they always want to see the shrine. This is indeed the Lord's glory!

"The whole Bengal is flooded this year. You cannot imagine the terrible condition of the people — homeless, without any food for days, without anything but rags on. We are collecting clothes and saris, rice, money; whatever we can get. Also, we are ready to go and look after the sick when it will be necessary. It will be a blessing if we are able to do something. It will be a blessing to these girls who have never known what loving service is and what a joy it can give."

In the year 1935, Swami Paramananda journeyed to India and for the first time saw the Ashrama with his own eyes. Miss Lois Houghton, a devoted member of the Boston work, who was assisting Charushila Devi at Dacca at the time wrote the following account of that memorable visit. It gives a very vivid picture of the grace and beauty of an Indian welcome.

"The Ashrama made great preparation for Swami's reception. Everything was washed, dyed, dried and polished . . . Everybody was jubilant. The school stood at attention along the walks in the garden of the Ashrama and cheered the arrival of the cars, while conch shells added their distinctive note of welcome. The girls had

made most beautiful garlands for the travellers, which had been put on at the boat-landing, so altogether the garden with all its color and life made a very vivid picture, in the center of which Swamiji in yellow robe and resplendant turban stood forth as the first magnitude star. Charushila Devi had caused to be erected in the garden, a platform where Swamiji sat for the evening entertainment, and from which he spoke. Many came. Five Ashrama girls in yellow saris and wearing marigold wreaths in their black hair sang a ceremony of worshipful greeting which was very effective. Each offered something — the scroll of greeting, painted on silk, being one of the offerings."

On another day, during the Swami's visit, Charushila Devi's birthday was celebrated. Miss Houghton wrote: "Though it was still raining, the rain did not prevent a most distinctive ceremony when each girl came to greet her, touch her feet and receive her embrace. That was a picture! I wish you could all see with your own eyes . . . Perhaps you can imagine the color and the flowers and eager faces and beautiful saris, and spotless white on the men."

In 1943, from a full heart, Charushila wrote to her beloved ones of the West: "The work here is continuing and held beautiful though with tremendous strain of which I need not tell you in detail. My full conviction is that the work will live and grow in spite of all the obstacles that are coming in its way, because it is his (Swami's) work, his wish was the start, and his inspiration and advice were the nourishment for its growth, and still are. Eighty people have to be fed at one meal. That is not a joke in these hard days, especially for an institution which has no funds to depend on. Yet the inmates are

not starved; the religious activities, as well as the service through education and relief to the helpless and destitute, are still going on without any break.

"I kneel gratefully at the Lord's blessed feet for picking up this frail instrument and making it worthy, through His grace, to carry on His wonderful work, which is benefitting many, arousing their self-reliance and their faith in themselves. Not only I, but all of us feel His guiding hand, His blessing showered incessantly, and our hearts are filled with courage to meet even the most fearful odds.

"The twenty-first of June (the anniversary of Swami Paramananda's passing) was spent silently, keeping vigil in the shrine, meditating on the radiantly shining figure, the embodiment of love and kindness. In the evening we read from the *Message of the East,* the number dedicated to his Holy memory. All eyes were wet; we felt as though heavenly peace were abiding with us; we were really lifted above the noises of the modern world."

The following Sunday over four hundred poor people were fed. Most of those invited were of destitute but proud families who would not ask for food. In addition, about one hundred and fifty street beggars were given food. Charushila wrote: "About 9:30 p.m., someone came running with the news that there were still forty beggars at the gate and they refused to move unless given something to eat. How wonderful His ways are! We all, including those poor people, partook of the *Prasad* (the blessed food from the shrine) and all were fully satisfied.

The productions are receiving enthusiastic appreciation — so much so that it is impossible to meet the demand. I know you will all be glad that all is well with the Lord's work everywhere."

By 1945 India was suffering the full effects of World War II. The Ashrama had not escaped its repercussions, but its spirit remained untouched. This is clearly revealed in a letter from Charushila, written at this time to an American friend: "War has wrought a condition in already depleted India which can better be understood than described. Food is the main and first question and naturally a huge part of the population cannot afford education. Most of the educational institutes are suffering from financial difficulties, excepting the government-managed ones. Ours, being a bit different from others — rather a new kind — has to struggle tremendously with financial odds. Considering the present chaotic condition of the country — famine, disease, epidemic and all that — education cannot be neglected. If people get used to thinking of food and sleep only, they will become like beasts. So we have to keep our home fires burning in the name of the Lord and He will do the needful, always is doing, guiding His frail children to the right path.

"To make this a real Ashrama school everything follows the Indian way. I am sure you would love the open class rooms, located in a spacious garden where flowers abound all the year round, and in them, children dressed in saris, sitting crosslegged on mats woven by themselves, reading and writing on low desks made especially to suit the purpose. The school is enjoying a summer vacation now, but there are many students, numbering about forty, who did not go home. In the afternoon you should see them picking luscious mangoes and having a grand time.

"I am writing to you, sitting in an open veranda. It is overlooking the garden; a cool breeze is blowing from the river, tempering the terrible heat of our summer. The day is beautiful and everything seems to be peaceful, as though in another world."

Conditions in India grew steadily worse as famine and mob violence followed fast upon the post-war dissensions and geographical divisions.

"Bengal is under such wild madness at present that nothing is certain," Charushila wrote in a letter dated October 13, 1946. "I do not know how much is or can be filtered through the press to your public. These terrible riots have been going on for the last three months and though they are named 'communal' we know for certain and have continuous proof that they are political, and it is so barbarously wild that our livelihood has become impossible and life unbearable. All the demon qualities being let loose, this problem has made us forget for the time being about the great famine spreading its claws around us. There never has been a national problem such as we are experiencing now. However, it is our good fortune that we are still getting our ration out of which, from our own share, we are able to feed some of our hungry brothers and sisters." The Disciple believes that it was during this period of great trial that on a certain occasion the girls of the Ashrama gave half the food on their own plates to feed the starving people lying outside on the street.

"You will be shocked to hear," Charushila continued in the same letter, "that five hundred houses have been burned in a few adjacent villages (that is, set fire to). Men, women and children — three thousand in number — came to this city for shelter and protection. We have been offering our quota to the poor villagers who have not left their homes but have no way of buying food. We have given away so far, four *maunds* of rice, some clothes, salt and vegetables — all from our own share. The Ashrama is hard hit at this time of crisis, I must

admit to you, but I know in my heart of hearts that through the Lord's grace she is going to weather the storms and come out of it all victorious.

"More things have come to light now than when I wrote to you a few months ago. We are all aware now how appalling is the food shortage and how very much we are dependent upon the kindness of other countries. Thank God that some countries like Australia and America are willing to send foodstuff to save our people. We should be ever grateful to them for their brotherly spirit.

"Here the girls are well and keeping busy. Many of them were not forunate enough to come in contact or even see our blessed Swamiji. But being in the Ashrama and listening to his inspiring words every morning through *Daily Thoughts* they are spontaneously and unconsciously being molded by the ideal he held before us. He, being the Ashrama *guru,* they feel proud to belong to him."

In 1947, just after Charushila Devi had established herself in a new and what she hoped would be a permanent home for the work, the growing cleavage between the Hindus and the Mohammedans became a political fact, and Charushila Devi found herself in Pakistan or the Mohammedan section of the country. Her position immediately became precarious in the extreme. In fact, very shortly after the division occurred, she was given notice that she must move within twenty-four hours. This she refused to do because with her many girls and heavy equipment such as large looms, added to the fact that she had nowhere to go, made such a move impossible. The next day the order was rescinded, but she lived on in dread of what might happen next.

The final drama, not of the Ashrama itself, but of the Ashrama in Dacca, is described poignantly in a letter which arrived in the first part of 1950.

"There has been terrible carnage all throughout East Bengal as the result of which a few thousands of Hindus right around Dacca have been wiped out. To have a proper estimate of the killings, looting and arson is impossible. In Dacca, it began on the tenth of February last, when the Hindus did not have the slightest apprehension that such a thing could happen. In the area where we lived, it started at about half-past two or quarter to three in the daytime. We were fearfully shocked to find people breaking into houses, doing inhuman acts. Within a few minutes our house was attacked. Heavy axes were falling on the massive doors, and other weapons began breaking mortar and bricks on both sides. But two plus two, four strokes, and a voice was heard, deep and commanding, 'leave that, otherwise you die!' At once the mob dispersed like magic; but it was terribly sad and heart-breaking that the fury fell on the next door.

"So, to make a long story short, we have closed the Ashrama there and have come away to Calcutta with only our clothes and bedding. Our leaving Dacca was a Godsend. Steamer or train journey being perilous, I felt the girls must be rescued by plane; but how? Who were to bear that expense? Through His grace all was done. We had a free flight; not only that, a free transport in every way. The Government of India has arranged for us a temporary shelter in this women's institution where food and lodging are being taken care of.

"So I feel, and every one of us the same way, that though the experience was a horrid and terrifying one, it was the greatest blessing in disguise, making His guidance, His protection a vivid one, a living reality. *Jai Guru! Jai Thakur! Jai Ma!*"

Now, once more, the Ananda Ashrama is performing

its great service. In addition to her own Ashrama girls, Charushila Devi has been given charge by the Government of India, of hundreds of refugee children from Pakistan. Truly her faith has sustained her, but without love in her heart for her Ideal and for her fellow beings, the protection that enfolded her in her hour of need might not have been forthcoming. The Disciple pays homage to Charushila Devi, devoted, capable, strong; the founder of a great and useful work. In her heart, the Disciple likes to think of Charushila as she saw her at the Boston Centre, eloquently speaking from the platform; but most of all she treasures the memory of those moments when Charushila told marvelous tales of her childhood while snuggled against her on the couch in the living room or while stirring the curry with a spoon, over the kitchen stove.

REPORT

ANANDA ASHRAMA, LA CRESCENTA, CALIFORNIA

The month of April brought its full share of celebrations to the California Ashrama. Good Friday fell on April 3rd and was observed by a silence from noon until three o'clock when a public service was conducted in the Temple of the Universal Spirit. Easter morning dawned grey and damp but found many friends gathered under the trees in the Temple patio to share the blessings of an Easter Sunrise Service. Breakfast was served afterwards at the Ashrama Community House to a large number of the early risers. Many stayed on for the eleven o'clock service when the Temple was filled almost to overflowing with eager visitors, come to hear Sister Daya speak on *Christ the Eternal.* Luncheon was then served, again at the Community House, and in the afternoon the

Sister spoke again, her subject being *Son of God and Son of Man.* The day was a happy and rhythmic one, truly appreciated by all who made their Easter pilgrimage to the La Crescenta hills.

On Sunday, April 26th, the Ashrama celebrated its 30th anniversary. The Ashrama has been compared to a great mother holding at her heart rest and sustenance of spirit for her many children. Thus on her Day she seemed to glow with an especial beauty as, like grateful children to a tender mother, devoted friends, at both services, laid their verbal tribute of love and appreciation at her feet. Everyone who shared the fruits of the day went away deeply moved by the thought of his connection with a community, for thirty years dedicated to the highest.

VEDANTA CENTRE, ANANDA ASHRAMA, COHASSET

After a six months' pilgrimage in India, Srimati Gayatri Devi is back once more at the Ananda Ashrama, Cohasset. She arrived there on Tuesday, June 2nd, and brought happiness and new life to the devoted friends and students who had faithfully carried on the work during her absence. The following Thursday night, she gave a talk on India at the Ashrama's room at the International Institute at 190 Beacon St., Boston. Many old friends were there to greet her and the feeling of warmth and welcome was very evident. The Sunday following, Gayatri Devi conducted the regular morning Service under the sanctuary pines at the Ashrama.

In preparation for the guests who are expected at the Ashrama during the summer months, a program of activities is being planned, which will lay emphasis on the community's spiritual life. The Ashrama which is now the permanent home of the former Vedanta Centre of Boston, extends a hearty welcome to all.